



Antigua and Barbuda

International Religious Freedom Report 2005

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights, and Labor

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice.

There was no change in the status of respect for religious freedom during the period covered by this report, and government policy continued to contribute to the generally free practice of religion.

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom.

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights.

Section I. Religious Demography

The country has an area of 170 square miles, and its population is approximately 68,000. A portion of the population is comprised of citizens of other Caribbean nations, and there is a growing, although still small, percentage of citizens from China. The dominant religion is Christianity, and the Antigua Christian Council represents the religious beliefs practiced by slightly more than 70 percent of the population. Its members are the Anglican, Methodist, Moravian and Roman Catholic Churches and the Salvation Army. The Anglican Church is by far the largest, accounting for an estimated 35 percent of the population. The Methodist and Moravian Churches account for approximately 15 percent each, while the Catholic Church estimates that its membership is 6 percent. Religious freedom for others is not restricted, and evangelical churches, along with several small, independent churches, have flourished in recent years. Jehovah's Witnesses number approximately 400 members. The United Evangelical Association, an organization that includes most independent evangelical churches, claims an estimated 25 percent of the population. There was no information on the number of atheists or persons who did not follow a particular religion.

The total number of non-Christians is small. They include adherents of Islam; the Baha'i Faith, with approximately 50 members; and Rastafarianism, with an estimated 1,000 to 1,500 adherents.

Section II. Status of Religious Freedom

Legal/Policy Framework

The Constitution provides for freedom of religion, and the Government generally respects this right in practice. The Government at all levels strives to protect this right in full and does not tolerate its abuse, either by governmental or private actors.

The Government is secular and does not interfere with an individual's right to worship. However, the Government maintains a close relationship with the Antigua Christian Council. The Prime Minister assumed responsibility for the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs in 2004. This previously obscure portfolio within the Ministry of Home Affairs was established upon independence in 1981. Under the administration, the Prime Minister has raised this portfolio to prominence, indicating that his government "strongly advocates the involvement of the Christian community in every aspect of nation building and believes that the church and its leaders have a meaningful role to play." The role of the Ministry of Ecclesiastical Affairs has been to coordinate and facilitate greater interaction between churches, other religious organizations, and the Government, and to facilitate the free movement of pastors into the country.

The Christian holy days of Good Friday, Easter Monday, Whit Monday, and Christmas are national holidays.

Currently, ministers of religion are prohibited constitutionally from running for elected office. At the end of the period covered by this report, the prohibition was being examined by the Government, which was considering proposing an amendment to allow them to run.

Religious groups are not required to register with the Government; however, groups must incorporate in order to own property. Tax and duty-free concessions, especially for building and development, are available to groups that register.

Public schools are secular; religious education is not part of their curriculum.

Restrictions on Religious Freedom

Government policy and practice contributed to the generally free practice of religion. Adherents to the Rastafarian faith complain that the use of marijuana, used in their religious rituals. The Rastafarian movement in Antigua has met with the Prime Minister and submitted a petition to decriminalize the use of marijuana.

There were no reports of religious prisoners or detainees.

Forced Religious Conversion

There were no reports of forced religious conversion, including of minor U.S. citizens who had been abducted or illegally removed from the United States, or of the refusal to allow such citizens to be returned to the United States.

Abuses by Terrorist Organizations

There were no reported abuses targeted at specific religions by terrorist organizations during the period covered by this report.

Section III. Societal Attitudes

The generally amicable relationship among religions in society contributed to religious freedom. The Antigua Christian Council conducts activities to promote greater mutual understanding and tolerance among adherents of different denominations within the Christian faith. The council, along with a number of other churches, successfully promoted peace during the 2004 national elections. Prior to the vote, the council prepared a "Code of Ethics," which denounced violence, incitement to violence, name-calling, and character assassinations; the code was signed by every candidate.

Rastafarians complain that there was widespread discrimination against their members, especially in hiring and in schools.

Section IV. U.S. Government Policy

The U.S. Government discusses religious freedom issues with the Government as part of its overall policy to promote human rights. The U.S. Embassy also discussed these issues with local religious groups.

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